In the Claims

Please substitute the following amended claims for those currently pending:

1 - 30. (Canceled)

31. (currently amended) A ladder, comprising:

a first stile, a second stile and a plurality of rungs extending between the first stile and the second stile;

the first stile comprising a first column and a second column ~~a plurality of columns~~ disposed in a nested arrangement for relative lengthwise movement in a telescopic fashion;

a latch mechanism for selectively locking ~~a~~ the second column relative the first column;

a button operatively coupled to the latch mechanism for actuating the latch mechanism;

the button having a depression dimensioned to receive a tip portion of a thumb of a hand;

the button being positioned so that the depression receives the tip portion of the thumb while the first column is grasped between a palm of the hand and at least one finger of the hand.

32. (Original) The ladder of claim 31, wherein the latch mechanism is biased to assume a locked position.

33. (Original) The ladder of claim 31, wherein the latch mechanism is biased to assume a locked position by a spring.

34. (Original) A ladder, comprising:

a plurality of rung units;

each rung unit comprising a left column, a right column, and a rung extending between the left column and the right column;

the left columns being disposed in a nested arrangement for relative lengthwise movement in a telescopic fashion;

the right columns being disposed in a nested arrangement for relative lengthwise movement in a telescopic fashion; and

a strap disposed around the rungs for selectively precluding relative movement between the rung units.

35. (currently amended) A ladder, comprising:

a first stile, a second stile and a plurality of rungs extending between the first stile and the second stile;

the first stile comprising a first column and a second column ~~a plurality of columns~~ disposed in a nested arrangement for relative lengthwise movement in a telescopic fashion;

~~each column being coupled to a rung by a connector;~~

the first column being coupled to a first rung by a connector;

the connector comprising an annular wall and a lip extending over a distal end of the first column so that the weight of a person standing on the first rung is transferred to the distal end of the first column by the lip of the connector.

36. (Original) The ladder of claim 35, wherein the connector comprises a metallic material.

37. (Original) The ladder of claim 36, wherein the connector comprises aluminum.

38. (New) The ladder of claim 31, further including:

a ring coupled to the first column proximate a distal end thereof;

the ring including an internal guiding surface for contacting an exterior surface of the second column.

39. (New) The ladder of claim 38, further including:

a sleeve coupled to the second column proximate a proximal end thereof;

the sleeve including an external guiding surface for contacting the internal surface of the first column.

40. (New) The ladder of claim 39, wherein the first column comprises a first material and the sleeve comprises a second material different from the first material.

41. (New) The ladder of claim 40, wherein the first material and the second material comprise materials which are unlikely to gall when placed in sliding contact with one another.

42. (New) The ladder of claim 40, wherein the first material and the second material comprise materials which provide a relatively low friction interface when placed in sliding contact with one another.

43. (New) The ladder of claim 40, wherein the first material comprises aluminum and the second material comprises a polymeric material.

44. (New) The ladder of claim 39, wherein the second column comprises a first material and the ring comprises a second material different from the first material.

45. (New) The ladder of claim 44, wherein the first material and the second material comprise materials which are unlikely to gall when placed in sliding contact with one another.

46. (New) The ladder of claim 44, wherein the first material and the second material comprise materials which provide a relatively low friction interface when placed in sliding contact with one another.

47. (New) The ladder of claim 44, wherein the first material comprises aluminum and the second material comprises a polymeric material.

48. (New) The ladder of claim 39, wherein:

the first column and the ring form a first column assembly;

the second column and the sleeve form a second column assembly; and

the first column assembly and the second column assembly contact one another only where the internal guiding surface contacts the exterior surface of the second column and where the external guiding surface contacts the internal surface of the first column.

49. (New) The ladder of claim 31, further including a sleeve coupled to the first column proximate a proximal end thereof; and

the sleeve including an external guiding surface for contacting an internal surface of another column.

50. (New) The ladder of claim 31, further including a second ring coupled to the second column by a second connector; and

the second ring including an internal guiding surface for contacting an exterior surface of another column.

51. (New) The ladder of claim 31, further including a collar disposed about the second column;

the collar being disposed between the sleeve and the second ring; and

the collar being dimensioned so that the connector will contact a first landing surface of the collar and a second connector will contact a second landing surface of the collar when the ladder is placed in a collapsed state.

52. (New) The ladder of claim 31, wherein the ring is coupled to the first column in a manner which allows the ring to float relative to the first column.

53. (New) The ladder of claim 31, wherein the ring is coupled to the first column by a connector which retains the ring in axial and radial directions relative to the first column while, at the same time, permitting some relative motion between the first column and the ring.

54. (New) The ladder of claim 52, wherein the relative motion provided between the first column and the ring has a magnitude that is sufficient to allow the ring to assume a position in which the internal guiding surface of the ring is disposed in coaxial alignment with the external guiding surface of the sleeve.

55. (New) The ladder of claim 39, wherein the ring is coupled to the column by a connector comprising an annular wall and a shoulder extending over a distal end of the first column.

56. (New) The ladder of claim 39, wherein the sleeve further includes a landing surface and the first column includes a stop.

57. (New) The ladder of claim 55, wherein the landing surface of the sleeve contacts the stop when a desired level of extension between the first column and the second column has been reached.

58. (New) The ladder of claim 55, wherein the stop comprises an inward projection.

59. (New) The ladder of claim 57, wherein the inward projection comprises a portion of a wall of the first column which has been displaced inwardly.

60. (New) The ladder of claim 39, wherein the sleeve is coupled to the second column at an interlocking connection.

61. (New) The ladder of claim 59, wherein the sleeve includes a plurality of protuberances which are received within openings of the second column for fixing the sleeve to the second column.